

EXCERPT

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Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue ***Moral and Spiritual Change in Christian Perspective***

Available January 22, 2019 | \$28, 288 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-2864-7

"*Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue* is a fitting tribute to Dallas Willard and a very helpful exchange of ideas for which I feel certain he would be grateful. . . . May this important work fan the flames of both Christian spiritual theology and psychology and diminish the effect of nonhelpful barriers and hidden assumptions."

Gary W. Moon, distinguished professor of psychology and spiritual formation, Richmond Graduate University

Why Study Psychology and Spirituality Together?

There are various indicators of a renewed interest in the study of moral and spiritual change, especially among philosophers and theologians. For instance, within virtue ethics, discussion of how virtues are acquired has gone from almost absolute silence within the literature to a beehive of activity. In her edited book *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology*, Nancy Snow observes, "The last thirty years have seen a resurgence of interest in virtue in Anglo-American philosophy. . . . Despite the rising interest in virtue, however, little attention has been paid to the question of how virtue is developed." Snow's book aims to partly remedy that deficit in the literature with twelve new essays that address the cultivation of virtue. And within theology, attention to spiritual formation at a more popular level and sanctification at a more scholarly level has increased by leaps and bounds. For instance, Kelly M. Kopic introduces his edited book *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice* with this: "In recent decades debates about justification have dominated the attention of many Protestants. . . . [Now] there are indications that a new season, with new challenges, is at hand. Evangelicals in particular demonstrate strong signs of a growing need to revisit the topic of sanctification. Fresh concern about this vital theological locus is surfacing, which is wonderful since this is where the church so often lives and breathes."

But while interest in the nature of spiritual formation has resurfaced afresh in philosophy and theology, psychologists have been engaged in this discussion all along. It is the modern dis-integration of psychology, philosophy, and theology—understood as distinct disciplines—that is partly to blame for this situation. Psychology, it could be thought, covers the domain of lived human experience, while modern philosophy and theology (perhaps particularly in their respective analytic and scholastic forms) are relegated to logical and conceptual analysis abstracted from the lived realities of human experience. The problem created by this fabricated separation is not simply that philosophy and theology are in need of the real-life observations of psychology, but psychology itself is starved of the epistemological and worldview considerations of philosophy and theology and driven instead by a naturalized, strict empiricism. And so we end up with a situation in which psychological theory and research needs to interact with theological and philosophical resources as much as theological and philosophical conceptualizations are in need of data and reflections from psychology. This is particularly the case when it comes to the interrelationship of psychology and spiritual formation.

In what has been said thus far, we have been using the terms "psychology" and "spiritual formation" to refer to distinct bodies of research and theory grounded in different methodologies. Understood in this way, the two fields make putative claims to knowledge in need of integration. But we can also think of the two terms as pointing to the actual lived realities of human mental life and transformation in Christ. That is to say, with psychology we are concerned with the fundamental phenomena of lived, human existence as it is experienced, and with spiritual formation we are concerned with that lived, human existence as it is experienced in Christ Jesus. It is from the investigation of these phenomena that the discipline of psychology and the field of spiritual formation find their impetus.

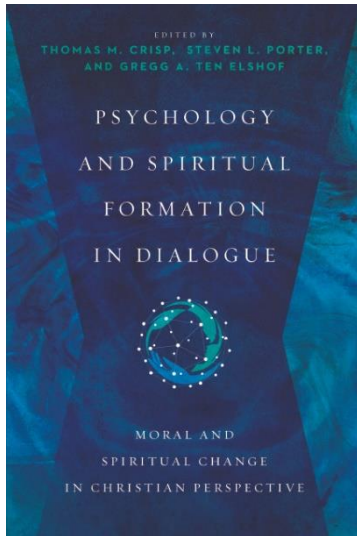


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But even in this way of thinking, there can remain an implicit division as if one can separate out the phenomenon of human mental life from the phenomenon of humans coming to have the mind of Christ. As Bruce Hindmarsh argues in chapter three of this book, there is an important theological case to be made that the end for which human persons were created shouldn't be separated out from an investigation of what it is to develop as a human person. And so, to the degree that modern psychology has separated its examination of human development or mental life from the fullness of human life in Christ, these psychological accounts will be, at best, truncated.

And yet a treatment of the reality of transformation in Christ will itself be enervated if it does not take the psychological dimensions of that transformational process seriously. In the final chapter of this book, Justin Barrett contends that there is evidence from developmental theory indicating that there are particular seasons of human development that are especially conducive to spiritual formation. Of course, the Scriptures themselves point us to the significance of human psychology time and time again. It is "from within, out of the heart," Jesus says, that every manner of evil precedes (Mk 7:21-23). Jesus repeatedly directs his students to the "inside of the cup" (Mt 23:26), the "healthy tree" that bears good fruit (Mt 7:17), and the inner, psychological springs of sinful behavior (e.g., Mt 5:27-28). Moreover, it is interpersonal, loving union and communion with himself by faith that grounds the hope of salvation. "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Mt 7:22-23). If we are ever tempted to return to a strictly behaviorist view of the person, a close reading of Jesus' theory of human personality should be enough to reign us back in.

It was thoughts and conversations such as these that fueled weekly discussions at Biola University's Center for Christian Thought (CCT) during our 2013–2014 year on the theme of "Psychology and Spiritual Formation." Over that year a group of sixteen CCT fellows and two pastors-in-residence gathered to discuss their own research on this topic as well as to hear from visiting scholars. This rich, interdisciplinary, yearlong discussion culminated with an end-of-the-year conference drawing together the CCT fellows, pastors-in-residence, and many of the visiting scholars. Various papers from that conference were subsequently revised and are presented here in their final form.

Because of the interdisciplinary focus of Biola's CCT, these chapters are somewhat unique in that they were prepared for a multidisciplinary audience and were forged out of discussion between theologians, New Testament scholars, philosophers, educators, pastors, and psychologists around the CCT seminar table. Furthermore, the chapter authors are known as scholars who not only have expertise in their primary disciplines but also possess sincere regard for and extensive fluency in relevant disciplines outside their own. This makes for a volume that will speak across typical disciplinary divides on this important and timely topic.

—Taken from the introduction



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